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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide formative Information about selected Orange County Public Schools (CPS) dropout prevention and retrieval programs. The following seven alternative learning programs were evaluated: School-Within-a-School; Alternative Resource Elementary Classrooms; The Challenge Center; The Plaza Center; BETA and ACEPT (teenage pregnancy programs); New Horizons; and In-School Suspension. Data sources included contacts with program representatives, literature reviews, site observation, document analysis, and interviews with teachers, administrators, students, occupation-placement specialists, and counselors. Participants were asked 13 questions regarding program goals and objectives, operational guidelines, staff development, collaboration, assessment, critical components and issues, program environment, and reporting procedures. Findings indicate that the programs met or exceeded the Florida Department of Education outcome objectives. Five tables and one figure are included. (LMI)

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# DROPOUT PREVENTION PROGRAMS

## PROGRAM EVALUATION REPORT
August 1992

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS


| | Page |
|---|---|
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | iii |
| PURPOSE OF EVALUATION | 1 |
| RELATED DISTRICT GOALS | 1 |
| PROGRAM DESCRIPTION | 1 |
| PROGRAM OBJECTIVES | 3 |
| EVALUATION QUESTIONS | 5 |
| PROCEDURES | 6 |
| FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS | 7 |

# DROPOUT PREVENTION PROGRAMS

# PROGRAM EVALUATION

**Executive Summary**

**Prepared by Diane Färdig, Ph.D.**

**September 1992**

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this evaluation was to provide formative information to decision makers about selected OCPS programs directed at preventing at-risk students from dropping out of school and retrieving dropouts so they may complete their education.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Special Student Needs Team implements the OCPS dropout prevention plan and administers and coordinates a wide variety of educational alternative programs located throughout the district. The Dropout Prevention Act of 1986, Section 230.2316, Florida Statutes, and subsequent Florida School Laws authorize and require many of the dropout prevention and retrieval programs. As the at-risk population grows, and as legislation continues to specify program requirements, dropout prevention programs continue to grow. Programs selected for inclusion in the program evaluation process included School-Within-A-School (SWS), Alternative Resource Elementary Classrooms, The Challenge Center, The Plaza Center, BETA and ACEPT (teenage pregnancy programs), New Horizons, and In-School Suspension (ISS).

## OVERALL CONCLUSION

Never has the term "in loco parentis" been more literal in meaning than in 1992. Teachers, administrators and support staff not only instruct children in academics, but are impelled to mold their development in social skills, values and character, and counsel them about life decisions. Orange County Public Schools personnel are entrusted with children, in, before and after the school day and, for some students, schools represent their only true safe environment. A great number of teachers, counselors, principals and classified staff are working diligently and selflessly to keep children in school and help them to succeed.

Results of the program evaluation of selected Alternative Education Programs and results of an audit of all alternative education programs of the Orange County Public Schools clearly indicate that these programs are serving the needs of at-risk students and providing an avenue for retrieving dropouts. The personnel responsible for implementing and supporting the programs are making real differences in the lives of at-risk youth and help effect improvement in academic performance and self-esteem for individual students. These valuable and diverse programs offer incremental change; that is, the programs improve the existing structure of school and offer alternatives to students who do not achieve success in those traditional structures. The programs, although constrained by the need

for special funding, were able to offer services to over 6,000 students who have an at-risk profile.

Despite these intense programs, there are many other students (estimates range from 25-35 percent of the total student population) who may be considered at-risk, or as educators interviewed during the evaluation project termed them, students who are "sitting on the fence," who also need the options that alternative education may provide to have a successful school experience. Fundamental school change is called for to meet the needs of all at-risk students. Such fundamental change, through school improvement, redefined curriculum, fresh instructional approaches, and alternative evaluation, may transform and permanently alter the traditional institutional structures not only for at-risk students, but for all children and youth in public schools. The results of this program evaluation project indicate that many OCPS instructional leaders recognize the need for change and are ready to work with the alternative education staff to make those changes. Collaboration among program personnel responsible for dropout prevention programs and personnel responsible for traditional school programs may be the first step in bringing about this fundamental change.

## EVALUATION QUESTIONS, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section contains the findings and recommendations relative to the evaluation questions.

1. **Are program goals appropriate as determined by literature reviews and the needs of the OCPS?**

Findings

District

Annual Operating Objective 1.02c clearly reflects the needs of the OCPS and is appropriate according to a review of related literature. The variety of goals presented for individual programs is appropriate according to a review of related literature.

Program

Program goals are in keeping with many of the program goals found in related literature. A review of related literature indicates that goals should reflect individual students' needs and include elements related to what research indicates is successful for at- risk students. Research indicates that there is a need to track and monitor at-risk students. Goals related to student participation in extracurricular activities and commitment of teaching faculty to at-risk youth are goals found in the literature, but these are not found in all OCPS program goals.

Recommendations

It may be appropriate to add program goals that are related to student participation in extracurricular activities and commitment of the entire school faculty to serving at-risk youth. It may be helpful to track at-risk students (e.g., longitudinal research) to provide further information about the appropriateness and relevance of program goals and objectives.

**2. To what degree does the program meet its objectives?**

Findings

The data from the 1990-91 Evaluation Report, Student Alternative Programs, related to the outcome objectives required by the Florida DOE indicated that the individual dropout prevention programs meet the criteria of the majority of outcome objectives. In some cases, the program's outcomes exceeded the outcome objectives required by the Florida DOE. This result was confirmed by a Florida DOE audit conducted in 1992.

Objectives required by the Florida DOE do not always reflect the goals of the program and the curriculum and instructional strategies employed by teachers to help at-risk students.

Recommendations

None.

**3. To what extent do the dropout prevention program objectives mandated by the Florida DOE reflect a systematic, integrated approach to serving at-risk students?**

Findings

The dropout prevention and retrieval program objectives mandated by the State of Florida describe programs, student eligibility criteria, and program requirements. The programs are intended for dropout retrieval, educational alternative programs, teenage parent programs, disciplinary programs, youth services programs, and substance abuse programs. The OCPS has implemented all of these programs according to the Dropout Prevention Act.

Examples of program requirements indicate that programs require certain components such as strong parental support and community support, but do not provide a systematic approach for acquiring those conditions.

Outcome objectives are aimed at the number of students who improve grades, improve attendance, and stay in school. Outcome objectives may not always address the actual reason for individual student referral or reflect actual student progress (e.g., poverty, dysfunctional families). The outcome objectives do not always reflect the program objectives, curriculum and instructional methods of the programs as they are implemented and consequently may not be useful, practical, relevant, and clear. OCPS Student Alternative Program personnel have brought this concern to the attention of Florida DOE personnel responsible for coordinating dropout prevention programs. Still, the objectives have not changed. Although the objectives are inspired by the legislation for dropout prevention, Florida DOE personnel have the responsibility for writing the objectives and district personnel may appeal to them for district collaboration in the writing of the objectives.

Recommendations

Consideration should be given to asking the highest level OCPS leaders to communicate to the DOE the need for a systematic, integrated approach to serving at-risk students that reflects the needs and resources of the OCPS as well as the criteria suggested by the foundation of research in alternative programs.

**4. Are there satisfactory operational guidelines for the program and are they available to program personnel and parents?**

Findings

General guidelines found in the Comprehensive Plan reflect many of the components recommended in the professional literature. Revised guidelines are being developed for the In-School Suspension program. Guidelines are not available that would provide a system for interdisciplinary planning and service among all OCPS personnel and teams, community agencies, business personnel, government agencies, parents, and others who may be responsible for educating, training, and assisting at-risk students (see evaluation question six).

Recommendations

Consideration should be given to rewriting program guidelines with specific information about best practices to assist OCPS personnel implement alternative education programs consistently and according to best practices.

Consideration should be given to providing specific program guidelines to initiate interdisciplinary planning and service that would provide increased opportunities for learning and success for at-risk students in regular classrooms as well as alternative classrooms. This program planning may be accomplished through restructuring and reform initiatives.

Consideration should be given to working with the elementary and secondary teams in determining what guidelines might increase opportunities for interdisciplinary planning and service to provide optimal conditions for student success.

**5. Is staff development adequate to meet the needs of teachers, counselors, support personnel, and administrators who implement or coordinate the programs?**

Findings

Staff development activities designated for alternative program personnel vary widely among programs. The instructional support teacher for alternative education provides staff development workshops and other activities to teachers and program assistants. The teacher works with small groups and individuals and models effective teaching techniques. These methods of staff development are perceived as effective by alternative education teachers. Staff development activities are also provided by district subject area program consultants in preplanning and on district inservice days. Alternative education teachers are encouraged to attend district content area staff development. Alternative education programs have an orientation for new teachers, which is supported by the curriculum resource teacher for that area.

Experienced alternative education teachers would like to be seen as experts and are willing to present information to fellow school faculty members. The research in alternative education confirms that in-house experts are effective sources of staff development. The Director for Alternative Programs regularly includes alternative education teachers (e.g., SWS teaching teams) in local and state staff development presentations.

Teachers new to alternative education usually have had no preservice education or inservice and staff development about alternative teaching methods and classroom management. New teachers could benefit from systematic staff development especially during the first year of alternative education teaching. All alternative teachers could benefit from staff development related to the purpose, goals and objectives of individual programs (e.g., parent involvement). As the percentage of at-risk youth increases, so does the need for staff development specific to teaching at-risk youth for all teachers.

Recommendations

Considerations should be given to entrusting the coordination of school-based staff development plans for alternative education teachers to the instructional support teacher for alternative education programs so she may work with the school-based staff development representative in coordinating staff development activities.

Consideration should be given to developing a cadre of in-house experts to increase the staff development options and opportunities for alternative education teachers and program assistants.

Consideration should be given to addressing the need for collaboration among personnel serving at-risk students at the school level by developing alternative education orientation presentations for principals, assistant principals, CRTs, deans, and guidance counselors.

Consideration should be given to extending the existing Alternative Education Centers teacher orientation program, based on systematic staff development, for all teachers who are new to the field of alternative education. Within the orientation may be the core skills needed by alternative education teachers so that systematic staff development may be based on these needs. The curriculum resource teacher for those programs may assist in this process.

Consideration should be given to reviewing the current list of inservice suggestions for alternative education to determine core competencies that meet the needs of alternative education teachers.

**6. Is there an articulated plan for coordinating all at-risk, dropout prevention efforts so that students achieve optimal success?**

Findings

A fully articulated plan does not now exist. As reflected in the data gathered for this question and in evaluation question number three, teachers and administrators in the OCPS indicate a high need for an articulated plan to ensure that programs for at-risk students are as effective, efficient, and integrated as possible to meet the needs of at-risk students.

Recommendation

Consideration should be given to organizing a blue-ribbon task force, coordinated by the Special Student Needs Team, to work with instructional and support programs to develop an articulated plan for all programs serving at-risk students to optimize programs and services for these children. Such a plan may create an in-house forum to enhance networking and integration of programs that serve at-risk children.

**7. How do state and district personnel collaborate to plan dropout prevention strategies?**

Findings

Florida DOE personnel responsible for dropout prevention programs provide technical assistance to district level personnel, but do not collaborate to plan dropout prevention strategies.

Recommendations

See evaluation questions 3 and 6.

**8. To what extent do dropout prevention goals for students reflect collaboration among faculty, parents, and community resource personnel?**

Findings

Two of the three elementary alternative classroom teachers, for the most part, work alone. One elementary alternative classroom teacher works cooperatively with the guidance counselor. This is contrasted with the high school model of school-within-a-school, where a team approach is taken and where there is often a large amount of collaboration with other school personnel. Parent participation and collaboration is minimal in both cases.

The In-School Suspension program assistant does not have opportunities to work collaboratively with other program staff and has few conferences with parents. This person is not typically part of any school department or team.

New Horizons counselors seem to collaborate most with the Student Assistant Team and less with the guidance department. A sample of alternative teachers, resource teachers, TAP coordinators, and counselors had specific examples of working with the New Horizons counselors. Only about 58% of parents participate in the program.

The Challenge Center teachers collaborate with job supervisors to enhance student academic and vocational success. The Plaza Center collaborates with PIC to obtain jobs for students.

Community resource personnel and other teachers in the school are not part of the goals for collaboration in the present program descriptions.

Recommendations

Consideration should be given to developing the collaborative efforts of the alternative elementary resource classroom to include resource persons such as guidance counselors, social workers, and other teachers. This collaboration may be outlined in the Comprehensive Plan for Dropout Prevention and communicated to principals and teachers.

Consideration should be given to assigning the in-school suspension program assistant to a school department (e.g., guidance) and to presenting the in-school suspension program description to faculty members at sharing sessions or faculty meetings.

Consideration should be given to making the New Horizons counselor part of the guidance department.

Consideration should be given to replicating the Challenge Center's collaboration with employers at other centers and in other programs.

**9. To what extent have schools established an assessment system for monitoring student progress, parent involvement, volunteerism, Partners in Education activities, student attendance patterns, and progress toward meeting program goals?**

Findings

Schools maintain a variety of records, many of which may impact at-risk students. Student progress is recorded using a variety of ways including informal teacher tests, grades, and portfolio materials. More formal methods are also used to trace student progress including the DRP, SAT-8, and other published tests. Schools and district offices maintain records about parent involvement, volunteer participation, and Partners in Education.

Administrators and counselors expressed a need for a system, readily available to schools, to monitor progress of at-risk students over time.

The annual school report is no longer required, so the school profile is no longer available. There is no system for describing schools in terms of student progress at this time. The Florida DOE will publish the requirements for a school "report card" in the fall of 1992.

Recommendation

Consideration should be given to working with instructional program leaders and information systems personnel in developing a system for monitoring student progress that would be accessible to teachers, and that would ensure confidentiality and fairness.

**10. What are the critical components and successful approaches of selected dropout prevention programs according to OCPS personnel and the review of related literature?**

Findings

The literature related to dropout prevention indicates that schools contribute to the failure of students by demanding that students adapt to school policies and practices rather than schools adapting to individual student needs. Levin points to three assumptions for any effective program for at-risk students including unity of purpose among parents, teachers and students; empowerment that goes beyond blaming others for failure; and building on strengths such as competent teachers, caring parents, and supportive community members.

The teachers and administrators in the School-Within-A-School programs and the Alternative Elementary Classrooms have reached consensus about the critical elements of a successful program for at-risk students. Examples of critical elements include selection of competent personnel, strong administrative support, positive view of the program, selection of students, parental support, common planning time, and high expectations for students. Teachers and administrators interviewed for this project would

like to see these elements available to all teachers in every school. There are barriers to implementing these elements, such as the elimination of the 7th period in secondary schools, which means that there is no common planning time available.

In-School Suspension program assistants have determined that there are critical elements necessary for successful use of this program including a unified school discipline philosophy and program enrollment not to exceed fifteen students per day.

Recommendations

Consideration should be given to including the critical attributes of the programs in the program description of the plan so that school faculty and administrators would be able to include these elements in the alternative programs at their schools.

Consideration should be given to providing the critical attributes of the School-Within-A-School to all teachers responsible for educating at-risk students through staff development activities.

**11. What are the critical issues facing teachers and administrators who are serving at-risk students?**

Findings

Interviews with a variety of OCPS personnel responsible for educating and caring for at-risk students reveal that educators have serious concerns about programs and services for at-risk students, including confusion over attendance policies, lack of parent participation, students with serious problems originating at home, but complicating school success, faculty response to at-risk students, no "umbrella" under which all programs are coordinated, and lack of uniformity in the code of student conduct.

Interviews also yielded a number of suggestions for improving services for at-risk students. Personnel perceived possible improvements through remedying the concerns listed above as well as increasing TAP, Compact, further integration of the guidance department and the Student Assistance Program, introduction of magnet high schools programs for at-risk students, expansion of Silver Star Center (Smith Center), and real change in the school.

During interviews OCPS teachers, counselors, and administrators revealed introspective concerns about how schools are treating at-risk students and the types of programs available for preventing students from dropping out. Each person interviewed expressed commitment to preventing students from dropping out of school and the desire to see students want to come to school.

Recommendations

Consideration should be given to forming a blue-ribbon at-risk task force at the direction of the Special Student Needs Team that would include representatives of teachers, parents, community leaders and school administrators who might jointly address critical issues in dropout prevention. This task force might address school improvement as it relates to these issues.

Consideration should be given to developing mentoring partnerships between elementary alternative resource classrooms and district teams to provide basic support for students (e.g., student clothing and shoes) and practical experience for ELC-bound employees (e.g., Information Systems, Business and Administrative Services).

Consideration should be given to initiating a study of the issues related to parent participation (delimited to participation of parents of at-risk children and youth) in the schools in cooperation with the Program Evaluation Office.

**12. Is the environment--including management, facilities, equipment, supplies, and materials--satisfactory to meet the needs of the program?**

Findings

It would appear that most programs for dropout prevention can be housed in regular classrooms. Some of the programs for dropout retrieval require nontraditional housing (e.g., Challenge Center at Disney World). Most of the programs that were included in the evaluation had adequate environments with the exception of ACEPT (which needed additional nursery space) and BETA (which needed additional student classroom space).

Recommendations

Consideration should be given to requesting that administrators enlarge the ACEPT nursery and to seek an additional site for BETA on existing OCPS property.

**13. What improvements are needed in the reporting procedures on dropout statistics to more accurately reflect actual dropouts?**

Findings

The formula for dropout rates is determined by the Florida DOE. The Florida dropout rate for 1990-91 was 5.6%. The OCPS dropout rate for 1991-92 is 3.75% (down from 6.07% in 1990-91). Student alternative programs may have had an impact on the reduction as well as improvements in record keeping required by the Florida DOE. There is no way to determine the exact reasons for the decrease in the number of dropouts.

A number of district and school-based personnel are responsible for attendance records that form the basis of dropout statistics. The information needed to determine the dropout rate is complex. Even with accurate dropout statistics, teachers and administrators cannot determine exactly what factors contributed to a change in the rates. Teachers and administrators expressed little concern about the yearly dropout rate, but enormous concern about the needs of at-risk students at their schools. Student services retrieval activities were reported as effective when used, but used only selectively, depending on the school faculty. This method has the advantage of collecting real data about why students are dropping out as well as affording the opportunity to retrieve dropouts.

There is potential for using the records kept by the OCPS related to dropout prevention programs and dropout as a strategy for school program improvement. School statistical summary reports, presented in an informational manner, could be used for school improvement (e.g., staff development initiatives and program improvement).

Recommendations

Consideration should be given to assisting schools in implementing retrieval methods that determine why students have dropped out, and provide the opportunity to retrieve the student by enrolling in GED, vocational/technical school, or enrolling in the home school.

Consideration should be given to using the Florida State Laws to encourage parents to take an active role in making sure schools know when their children have entered other types of programs (e.g., home schooling) or transferred to other schools. These laws may also be used to encourage parents to take responsibility for ensuring their children attend school regularly.

Consideration should be given to providing informational reports to schools that may show patterns in dropout prevention program services such as retention history, most frequent referral types, and most frequent referral sources. This information might be used as part of school improvement (e.g., staff development opportunities for teachers in dealing with certain discipline problems).

# ORANGE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
# DROPOUT PREVENTION
# PROGRAM EVALUATION REPORT

## PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The purpose of this evaluation was to provide formative information to decision makers about the OCPS programs directed at preventing at-risk students from dropping out of school and retrieving dropouts so they may complete their education.

## RELATED DISTRICT MISSION AND GOALS 1991-92

The mission of the Orange County Public Schools is to enable all student to achieve academic and vocational success, develop self- respect, and understand and appreciate others through the placement of competent and caring teachers in every classroom and the provision of necessary support services.

Goal 1: To enable all students to succeed in school and their chosen careers, to develop positive self esteem, and to be responsible citizens.

Goal 2: To staff schools and district-level departments with quality personnel and improve the job performance and job satisfaction of all employees.

Goal 3: To enhance involvement in the educational process and communications among students, staff, parents, the school board and the community, and to improve multicultural relations districtwide.

Goal 4: To improve the learning environment by providing support services to schools.

## PROGRAM BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION

The Dropout Prevention Act of 1986, Section 230.2316, Florida Statutes, was enacted to authorize and encourage district school boards to establish comprehensive dropout prevention programs. The Dropout Prevention Act established five program categories: educational alternatives, teenage parent, substance abuse, disciplinary and youth services, and included requirements for dropout retrieval activities.

The OCPS dropout prevention plan was originally approved in 1986. Program components expanded continually and in 1991 the program moved from Student Services/Exceptional Education Team to the Special Student Needs Team. The 1991-92 plan has several components that are found in Florida School Law (1991 and 1992). There are several types of student alternative programs to meet the needs of at-risk students and dropouts.

There are educational alternative programs at 27 sites, including three teenage parent programs, a substance abuse program at 19 sites, two disciplinary programs, in-school suspension at 35 sites, and 12 youth services programs. Alternative programs have grown steadily over the past three school years. Recent growth seems to be directed toward dropout retrieval (e.g., youth services) rather than dropout prevention (e.g., elementary resource rooms). The direction in growth seems to be affected by legislation related to public school responsibility for students in treatment and/or incarcerated youth.

It is important to recognize the challenge of dropout prevention. Florida has one of the most stringent graduation requirements in the nation due to the 1983 reform legislation, the RAISE Bill, and Florida State Statutes requiring a certain number of hours in attendance for each credit to be awarded toward the 24 credits required for graduation. Students are required to maintain a grade point average of at least 1.5 out of 4.0 to earn a diploma. No other state has a minimum GPA standard for graduation.

Student alternative programs that were part of the OCPS program evaluation project included the following:

1. Educational Alternative Learning Programs

The program evaluation focused on School-Within-A-School (SWS) programs in three middle and five high schools. These programs are for students who have not been successful in traditional classrooms and offer academic and affective instruction in a class that has a low teacher-student ratio (i.e., 1:25). Teachers use a team approach with common planning times to provide instruction that helps students succeed in coursework and to improve self esteem and decision making.

2. Alternative Resource Elementary Classrooms

This program is similar to the SWS program with academic and affective curriculum and instruction in a classroom with one teacher and a lower than average teacher-student ratio (i.e., 1:12). Students referred to this classroom have not been successful in the traditional classroom.

3. The Challenge Center

This center provides a partnership between the OCPS and Disney World so students can earn high school credits while gaining work experience. The program is for at-risk students as well as students who have dropped out. Teachers use a team approach, as SWS, and have a common planning time. The Center has a low student-teacher ratio (i.e., 1:11).

4. The Plaza Center

This center opened in February 1992 and is modeled after The Challenge Center with students attending class half days and earning full high school credits, then gaining work experience for the other half day. Teachers use a team approach with a common planning period. There is a lower than usual teacher-student ratio (i.e., 1:13).

5. Teenage Pregnancy Programs

BETA is a private, nonprofit organization that assists pregnant young women, teenage parents, and their families. The OCPS provides high school course instruction for these young women. BETA provides infant care, nutrition, health instruction and access to social services. BETA is located on Lake Underhill Drive.

ACEPT is an educational program for pregnant teenagers, teenage parents, and their children. Academic coursework, parenting classes, and infant care instruction are provided. ACEPT is located on the campus of Westside Vocational Technical Center (Westside).

6. New Horizons

New Horizons counselors, from the Center for Drug Free Living, provide substance abuse awareness and counseling at middle and high schools. Individual, group, and family counseling is provided for students who are alcohol or drug dependent or have parents who are alcohol or drug dependent.

7. In-School Suspension

The primary purpose of in-school suspension is to provide a positive influence and resource for students who have a history of disruptive behavior. In-school suspension units are located in middle and high schools.

Other Programs and Services (not included in the evaluation)

Wymore Career Education Center, an alternative high school for students in grades 7-12, participated in a Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) evaluation project during 1991-92 and was not a part of the program evaluation. Wymore was selected as one of six "Exemplary Dropout Prevention Programs" in the southern region.

There are many other OCPS programs and services that are intended to meet the needs of at-risk students including Chapter I, Bilingual Education, Teachers as Advisors Program (TAP), PREP, and free and reduced lunches and breakfasts. These programs are not part of the dropout prevention programs of the Special Student Needs Team, but are described in the Comprehensive Plan for Dropout Prevention.

## PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Annual Operating Objective 1.02c of the Special Students Needs Team is: To reduce the district dropout rate by one percent by promoting, developing, and implementing a systematic effort of dropout prevention.

This annual operating objective is directly related to the district Strategic Objective 1.02: To improve the academic performance of students who are not achieving success in traditional programs and to assist them in setting achievable career goals by developing strategies and delivering programs and services in specially-designed learning environments by June 30, 1995.

Individual program objectives are required by the State DOE. Each alternative program has outcome objectives, such as the following example:

> The annual dropout rate among students participating in the program will be less than 15% of student enrollment.
>
> Eighty percent of students participating in the program will demonstrate a more positive attitude toward school and increased coping skills as measured by self-survey and teacher rating.
>
> Of the students completing the program, 80% will show a decrease in the number of referrals, suspensions, and expulsions from the previous grading period or school year.

Of the students completing the program, 75% will maintain a grade point average of 1.5 out of 4.0.

Student Eligibility Criteria

Each program has specific student eligibility criteria reflecting the attributes of at-risk students. As an example, the criteria for students to be included in the Alternative Elementary Resource Classroom include that the student has at least one of the following conditions:

been retained
multiple low grades achievement test scores below the average norm more than five absences in a grading period, multiple guidance referrals, and a personal or family problem (documented by student services personnel) that interferes with school success.

Student eligibility is related to the characteristics of at-risk students based on a foundation of research. These characteristics, in addition to those listed above, include low self esteem, multiple guidance referrals, pregnancy, court referral, agency referral, frequent discipline problems, evidence of poor social skills, loneliness, stress or loss, lack of motivation for school, and test scores of stanine three or below on district standardized achievement tests.

## PROGRAM PERSONNEL

District program personnel are members of the Special Student Needs Team. Members include the following:

Director, Student Alternative Programs, is responsible for coordinating all dropout prevention and retrieval programs in the district.

Principal, Alternative Education Centers, is the administrator responsible for several student alternative programs including The Challenge Program, The Plaza, Parramore Program for Out-of-School Suspension, Teenage Pregnancy Programs (two), ALPHA, and Youth Services Programs (five). He reports to the Director for Student Alternative Programs.

Assistant Principal, Alternative Education Centers, assists with the administration of the programs listed above.

Counselor, Alternative Centers reports to the principal for the Alternative Education Center and provides academic assessment and counseling for at-risk students and retrieval counseling for students who have dropped out.

Counselor/Occupational Specialist Dropout Retrieval Contact is responsible for recruiting students for the Challenge Center and Plaza Center, and is the district contact for dropouts and potential dropouts.

District Instructional Support Teacher, Alternative Programs, reports to the Director for Student Alternative Programs and provides staff development to all teachers who have responsibility for implementing at-risk programs, and is the resource person for in-school suspension program assistants.

Curriculum Resource Teacher (CRT), Alternative Programs, reports to the Principal for Alternative Centers and provides curriculum and instructional support to teachers at all centers.

Program Assistant, Dropout Prevention has responsibilities for collecting dropout prevention data and completing program reports for compliance with Florida DOE guidelines. She reports to the Director for Student Alternative Programs.

School-Based Personnel

A number of school-based teachers and program assistants are responsible for implementing alternative programs and support services for at-risk students. These personnel report to the school administration and include the following:

Over 150 teachers provide instruction for at-risk students in the various dropout prevention and retrieval programs in elementary, middle, high, and alternative schools and programs.

Thirty-five Program Assistants for In-School Suspension have responsibility for operating in-school suspension programs at middle and high schools.

Twenty New Horizons counselors are responsible for providing drug and alcohol awareness and counseling to students, families, and teachers at middle and high schools.

## EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The following evaluation questions were used to guide the evaluation:

1. Are program goals appropriate as determined by literature reviews and the needs of the OCPS?

2. To what degree does the program meet its objectives?

3. To what extent do the dropout prevention program objectives mandated by the Florida DOE reflect a systematic, integrated approach to serving at-risk students?

4. Are there satisfactory operational guidelines for the program, and are they available to program personnel and parents?

5. Is staff development adequate to meet the needs of teachers, counselors, support personnel, and administrators who implement or coordinate the programs?

6. Is there an articulated plan for coordinating all at-risk, dropout prevention efforts so that students achieve optimal success?

7. How do state, district, and school personnel collaborate to plan dropout prevention strategies?

8. To what extent do dropout prevention goals for students reflect collaboration among faculty, parents, and community resource personnel?

9. To what extent have schools established an assessment system for monitoring student progress, parent involvement, volunteerism, Partners in Education activities, student attendance patterns, and progress toward meeting program goals?

10. What are the critical components of selected dropout prevention programs according to personnel responsible for implementing programs?

11. What are the critical issues facing teachers and administrators who are serving at-risk students?

12. Is the environment--including management, facilities, equipment, supplies, and materials--satisfactory to meet the needs of the program?

13. What improvements are needed in the reporting procedures on dropout statistics to more accurately reflect actual dropouts?

## PROCEDURES

Data sources used to provide the basis for the answers to the 13 evaluation questions were as follows:

Program Contacts

Mrs. Margaret Gentile, the Director for Student Alternative Programs, was consulted on a regular basis and provided program descriptions, records, and other valuable information, as well as access to programs.

Ms. Kathy Roach, Instructional Support Teacher for Student Alternative Programs, provided information about in-school suspension, alternative resource classrooms and school-within-a-school teams programs.

Review of Literature

An extensive review of related literature was conducted with special emphasis on reports describing program results.

Site Visits and Observations

The evaluator made visits to programs included in the evaluation project.

Review of Records and Materials

District records were reviewed to determine the status of outcome objectives. Staff development materials, program materials and reports were also reviewed.

Structured Interviews

The program evaluation relied heavily on information obtained from structured interviews. Structured interviews, developed for each program, were used to collect program information from teachers, administrators, program assistants, students, counselors, and occupational placement specialists.

## EVALUATION QUESTIONS, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section contains the findings, conclusions, and recommendations relative to the evaluation questions.

**1. Are program goals appropriate as determined by literature reviews and the needs of the OCPS?**

Findings

The alternative education programs have two levels of goals: overall district goals and specific program goals.

District Goals

Strategic Objective 1.02 states: To improve the academic performance of students who are not achieving success in traditional programs and to assist them in setting achievable career goals by developing strategies and delivering programs and services in specially designed learning environments by June 30, 1995.

Annual Operating Objective 1.02c states: To reduce the district dropout rate by one percent by promoting, developing, and implementing a systemwide effort of dropout prevention.

The Needs of the OCPS

These objectives are directly related to the mission statement of the district: The mission of the OCPS is to enable all students to achieve academic and vocational success, develop self respect, and understand and appreciate others through the placement of competent and caring teachers in every classroom and the provision of necessary support services.

Literature Related to Overall Goals

One of the primary initiatives of the Florida DOE is to reduce the number of dropouts. In December 1991, the Florida DOE announced that the state dropout rate had decreased from 6.55 in 1989-90 to 5.61 in 1991- 92. This meant that in 1991-92, 4,308 fewer students had dropped out of school. The graduation rate increased from 71.47 in 1989-90 to 73.06 in 1990-91.

The President's National Education Goals for the year 2000 include: (a) increasing the percentage of students graduating from high school to at least 90 percent, and the percentage of dropouts who return later to complete a high school degree or its equivalent to 75 percent; and (b) closing the gap in high school graduation rates between American students from minority backgrounds and their non-minority counterparts.

A number of facts support the goal of producing students with a high school diploma. Dropping out may mean less earning power for the individual (usually stated as 20-25% less than counterparts with a high school diploma). Less earning ability affects the nation economically with decreased earning and tax revenues with the same or increased need for social services, like welfare. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (1991), persons 25 years and older who had not completed high school had a poverty rate of 23.6 percent. For those who graduated from high school, but not college, the rate was 8.9 percent; for

those who completed one or more years of college, but did not graduate, the rate was 5.8 percent; and for college graduates, the rate was 2.8 percent.

Another report estimates that nationally, approximately 500,000 students per year leave school before graduation and that the estimated cost to the nation per year for this unprepared workforce is $50 billion in foregone lifetime earnings.

The recent Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, or SCANS, (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991) implies that high school completion is necessary for employment and makes recommendations for competencies every student should possess by the completion of high school. The SCANS document supports the America 2000 goals.

Not all groups are concerned with statistics such as these. The Heritage Foundation, a conservative Washington D.C. think tank, published a report in 1990 that concluded that there is "no need for costly dropout prevention programs because 87.1 percent of youth now complete a high school education by age 24, nearly achieving President George Bush's goal of a 90 percent graduation rate by the year 2000." The Heritage Foundation contends that calculations of high national and urban dropout rates have resulted in a "phantom crisis." The foundation maintains that many of the causes of dropouts are beyond the control of the schools and that the best solution is school choice and incentives.

The Florida legislature and DOE has placed special emphasis on dropout prevention. Florida State Laws describe dropout programs required for school districts. The Florida DOE publishes updates about Florida's dropout rate.

Program Goals

Each dropout prevention program has goals, found in the Comprehensive Plan for Dropout Prevention for the 1991-92 school year. Outcome objectives are also listed. Most of the specific outcome objectives are legislation driven and rely on maintaining a large bank of statistical information and are addressed in evaluation question number three.

The program evaluation of dropout prevention focused on several programs including: school-within-a-school teams, elementary alternative resource classes, the Challenge Center, the Plaza Center, teenage pregnancy programs, the New Horizons program, and in-school suspension programs. The objectives for each program were reviewed.

Elementary Alternative Resource Classroom Goals:

To build self-esteem and social skills in young children who are exhibiting the at-risk characteristics of potential dropouts.

Alternative Learning Centers (School-Within-A-School) Goals:

To provide a positive alternative learning environment for students to have the opportunity to achieve academic success, participate in meaningful school activities, develop positive attitudes towards self, practice setting goals, build satisfactory interpersonal relationships, and explore decision making techniques.

To reduce traditional class size so that increased interaction time with caring, positive adult role models is possible.

The Challenge Center Goals:

To provide an educational experience and work environment to prevent high-risk students from dropping out of school and to encourage dropout students to return to school.

To provide intensive training and experience to help students acquire the positive attributes that help them find and retain employment.

The Plaza Center Goals:

To provide an educational experience and work environment to prevent high risk students from dropping out of school and to encourage dropout students to return to school.

To provide intensive training and experience to help students acquire the positive attributes that help them find and retain employment.

BETA and ACEPT Goals:

To maintain and sustain the educational program of school-age youth who have not received their high school diploma by providing the following services:

Helping students earn credits for a successful transition back to their former schools
providing support services to each young woman who is expecting a child or who has recently given birth to a child, the teenage fathers and the children
assisting students in need of acquiring social services to meet their special needs, and
providing counseling services to assist students in formulating an educational plan.

Short-Term Disciplinary Program (In-School Suspension) Goals:

To reduce the number of disciplinary infractions by allowing students to maintain academic progress through completion of academic course assignments, providing an alternative to out-of-school suspension, and helping students recognize the behavior they need to modify in order to remain in their regular classes.

New Horizons Program Goal:

To provide a substance abuse information, counseling, and treatment program within selected senior high schools and middle schools for students and their parents.

Literature Related to Program Goals:

The professional literature related to dropout prevention and at-risk student programs and services is voluminous. The challenge of keeping at-risk students in school faces great many school districts, and many school, district, state department and university personnel have contributed articles and reports detailing program components and results. A review of related literature indicates that while no two districts have the same programs, the program approaches are similar. For the most part, district and state department personnel first identify the characteristics of at-risk students, then develop programs that best suit the needs of the different categories of at- risk students. In

Florida, the state legislature has mandated certain programs for at-risk students and has determined program purpose and curriculum content for certain funded programs.

Research related to the theory of dropout prevention indicates that dropout prevention has several essential elements. One element is planning: a successful dropout prevention effort must custom design educational responses to the specific needs and conditions of the students. Programs naturally have a number of different objectives since student needs differ dramatically (e.g., the needs of teenage parents are very different than those of elementary students living in a shelter for the homeless). A review of program goals and objectives from various districts indicates that many do not reflect the individual needs of students, but rather have what might be called generic goals. Typical program goals are as follows:

> To improve student performance in mathematics, English and reasoning skills
>
> To increase students' self-esteem, self awareness, and motivation toward work
>
> To help students become better integrated toward school life and academic goals through enhanced interaction with peers, teachers, and others in the community

Program descriptions confirm that individual student needs were addressed through special teaching strategies, activities, and other interventions. These special needs were usually not reflected in goals and objectives.

Other elements include the recognition of the students' need to be part of a supportive peer group and the need for the students to participate in school activities. Research in dropout prevention also indicates that programs may benefit from some common objectives and these may include, but not be limited to, low teacher ratio, student participation in extracurricular events, and strong and committed teaching faculty.

Descriptions of programs for at-risk youth indicate that objectives and programs are related to decreasing the percentage of dropouts. Most of the programs described were guided by goals for the students, but not goals for overall coordination of the at-risk program. For example, the 1989-90 Austin Independent School District program evaluation of dropout prevention strategies recommended the following goals for the district:

> Match services to the needs of the students and eliminate gaps in existing services
> Coordinate existing programs and eliminate unnecessary overlap
> Track and monitor at-risk students
> Concentrate services on the students at greatest risk
> Monitor and evaluate existing programs

<u>Conclusions</u>

District

Annual Operating Objective 1.02c clearly reflects the needs of the OCPS and is appropriate according to a review of related literature. The variety of goals presented for individual programs is appropriate according to a review of related literature.

Program

Program goals are in keeping with many of the program goals found in related literature. A review of related literature indicates that goals should reflect individual students' needs and include elements related to what research indicates is successful for at- risk students. Research indicates that there is a need to track and monitor at-risk students. Goals related to student participation in extracurricular activities and commitment of teaching faculty to at-risk youth are goals found in the literature, but these are not found in all OCPS program goals.

Recommendations

It may be appropriate to add program goals that are related to student participation in extracurricular activities and commitment of the entire school faculty to serving at-risk youth. It may be helpful to track at-risk students (e.g., longitudinal research) to provide further information about the appropriateness and relevance of program goals and objectives.

**2. To what degree does the program meet its objectives?**

Findings

The Florida DOE requires certain outcome objectives for each program in the Dropout Prevention Plan. These outcome objectives vary among programs. An example of specific outcome objectives from the School-Within-A-School program includes the following:

By the end of the school year, the following objectives will be met:

a. Eighty percent of students will remain in school or graduate.
b. Of those students served for academic reasons, 60 percent will improve their attendance by 10 percent.
c. Of those students served for attendance reasons, 60 percent will improve their attendance by 10 percent.
d. Of those students participating in the program, 75 percent will be promoted to the next grade level or earn a diploma.

The data related to the outcome objectives required by the Florida DOE indicates that the individual dropout prevention programs meet the criteria of the majority of outcome objectives. This result was confirmed by the results of a Florida DOE audit conducted in 1992.

A summary of that data is presented here in table form for some of programs that participated in the OCPS evaluation project. The main source of this data is from the 1990-91 Evaluation Report, Student Alternative Programs.

Table 1
Results of OCPS Outcome Objectives for School-Within-A-School for 1991-92

| Specific Student Outcome Objectives | OCPS Middle School Results (N = 1 92) | OCPS High School Results (N = 377) |
|---|---|---|
| 80% remain in school | 100% remained in school | 97% remained in school |
| 60% improve GPA | 72% improved GPA | 55% improved GPA |
| 60% improve attendance | 64% improved attendance | 70% improved attendance |
| 75% promoted | 94% were promoted | 94% were promoted |

According to these figures, the School-Within-A-School units, for at-risk middle and high school students, collectively met or exceeded most program objectives required by the Florida DOE.

Table 2
Results of OCPS Outcome Objectives for ACEPT and BETA Programs for 1991-92

| Specific Student Outcome Objectives | ACEPT (N = 90) | BETA (N = 144) |
|---|---|---|
| 70% remain in school or graduate, continue academic program | 88% remained in school and continued academics | 79% remained in school and continued academics |
| 80% improve parenting skills | 84% improved parenting | 100% improved parenting |
| 90% no repeat pregnancy during school year | 91% no repeat pregnancy | 95% no repeat pregnancy |
| 70% deliver babies 5.5 lbs. or more | 94% delivered babies 5.5 lbs. or more | 64% delivered babies 5.5 lbs. or more |

The outcome objectives for ACEPT and BETA, programs for pregnant young women and teenage parents and their children, demonstrate the variety and scope of objectives for student alternative programs. Most Florida DOE outcome objectives were met or exceeded.

Table 3
Results of Outcome Objectives for the Alternative Resource Classroom (Elementary) for 1990-91*

| Specific Outcome Objectives | Three Elementary Alternative Resource Classrooms (N = 67) |
|---|---|
| 80% remain in school | 100% remained in school |
| 75% improve reading or math skills | 97% improved reading and/or math skills |
| 60% improve attendance | 72% improved attendance |
| 75% promoted | 100% were promoted |

Outcome objectives for the Alternative Resource Classroom were met or exceeded by the three classrooms. The specific eligibility criteria for students in this program are such that students may show a need in only one area (e.g., academic weaknesses, but not attendance problems) so the fact that these objectives were exceeded may be especially significant. Teachers also address social skill training and this is not reflected in the outcome objectives.

Table 4
Results of Outcome Objectives for the Challenge Center for 1990-91*

| Specific Outcome Objectives | Challenge Center (N = 65) |
|---|---|
| 80% remain in school | 100% remained in school |
| 60% improve GPA | 89% improved GPA |
| 60% improve attendance | 89 % improved attendance |
| 75% promoted | 100% were promoted |

During 1990-91 the Challenge Center students exceeded the specific outcome objectives for that program. The Challenge Center is a cooperative venture with Disney World for at-risk students and for those students re-entering high school.

* 1991-92 results were not available at the time this report was written, but preliminary statistics indicate that the results were comparable with 1990-91.

Table 5
New Horizons
Results of Outcome Objectives for the New Horizons Program for 1990-91

| Specific Outcome Objectives | New Horizons Program (N = 276) |
|---|---|
| 85% remain in school | 78% remained in school |
| 80% increase awareness of hazards of substance abuse | 100% increased awareness of hazards of substance abuse |
| 100% continue academic program | 78% continued academic program |
| 50% decreased use of substances | 77% decreased use of substances |

The cumulative results of the New Horizons program, which provides substance abuse information, counseling, and treatment for students and parents indicates that two objectives were exceeded and two objectives were not met. Specific objectives do not address parent participation, considered to be a critical component of substance abuse treatment.

Conclusions

The data from the 1990-91 Evaluation Report, Student Alternative Programs, related to the outcome objectives required by the Florida DOE indicated that the individual dropout prevention programs meet the criteria of the majority of outcome objectives. In some cases, the program's outcomes exceeded the outcome objectives required by the Florida DOE. This result was confirmed by a Florida DOE audit conducted in 1992.

Objectives required by the Florida DOE do not always reflect the goals of the program and the curriculum and instructional strategies employed by teachers to help at-risk students.

Recommendations

None.

**3. To what extent do the dropout prevention program objectives mandated by the Florida DOE reflect a systematic, integrated approach to serving at-risk students?**

Findings

Florida State Laws

Program objectives required by the Florida DOE are based on Florida School Laws enacted by the Florida Legislature. The dropout prevention programs were described in the 1986 edition of Florida School Laws. The 1992 edition describes specific criteria for programs, including educational alternative programs, teenage parent programs, substance abuse programs, and disciplinary programs. Florida School Laws (e.g., 1992) describe the program, student eligibility criteria, and staffing and funding procedures. The laws describe all programs in the following manner:

> "All programs funded pursuant to the provisions of this section shall be positive and shall reflect strong parental and community involvement."

This requirement is important for dropout prevention and retrieval programs to be successful, but the subsequent sections do not describe a systematic, integrated approach to make parent and community participation a reality. There are no specific outcome objectives reflecting parental and community involvement. School administration and faculty members have indicated a strong need for parents to become active in alternative programs, but report that few parents are actively involved. Community involvement is also desired and teachers reported a need for additional help with career education and vocational exploration activities. Review of OCPS Partners in Education partnerships (1991) indicated that few businesses and agencies had vocational exploration as part of their partnership contracts.

The criteria for placement in an educational alternative program include lack of motivation shown through grades which are not commensurate with documented ability level, high absenteeism, or other documentation provided by student services personnel. In addition, the student may not have been successful in school as determined by retention, failing grades, or low achievement test scores and has needs and interests that cannot be met through federal compensatory education programs or exceptional education programs. The student may have been identified as a potential dropout by student services personnel using district or state criteria. The criteria for placement are mainly negative student attributes. The aim of each program is to be positive, but students, placed in alternative programs for failing grades or low achievement scores, may not perceive the program as positive. Funding requirements foster further isolation and do not allow students to "mix" with non-risk students in that FTE class group. Provisions to allow "mainstreaming" are complex and difficult to implement. Teachers may also not perceive alternative programs as positive. Both these possibilities were confirmed by teachers of alternative programs.

Funding for alternative programs is supplied from weighted full-time equivalent (FTE) reimbursement from the state. These monies are not always adequate to fund the programs as they are specified in the Florida State Laws. As an example, the teenage parent programs are to provide necessary child care, health care, social services, and transportation for teenage parents. Children of pregnant teens are eligible for child care up to age five.

Outcome Objectives

Research in dropout prevention indicates that the curriculum and teaching of successful programs for at-risk students must be substantially different from what is routinely offered in the regular high school curriculum. Differences include individualized learning, clear and specific objectives, prompt feedback, concrete evidence of progress, and an active role for students.

Review of the outcome objectives mandated by the Florida DOE reveal outcome objectives for the class of students, not individual students (i.e., the purposes of the programs are sometimes not reflected in the outcome objectives). For example, the Alternative Elementary Resource Classroom is for fourth and fifth grade elementary students who are at-risk. Legally these students cannot drop out. The outcome objectives for this program include that eighty percent of the students participating in the program will remain in school. Other outcome objectives are related to improved reading or math skills, improved attendance, and promotion to the next grade level. Although one of the major purposes of the program is to improve social skills, no Florida DOE outcome objectives are related to this objective. Although the area of social skills development is far less structured and does not lend itself to easy assessment, outcome objectives might encourage the inclusion of curriculum and activities aimed at improving social skills. Two

of the alternative elementary resource classroom programs in the OCPS reported having students who were living in poverty, some even homeless, who could not afford clothes and shoes for school. These students had at-risk conditions rather than characteristics. Improvement in their conditions and some of the related characteristics is not readily apparent in the results of the outcome objectives.

Data required by the Florida DOE clearly reveals if the dropout rate has decreased, stayed the same, or been reduced. The data does not reveal why the dropout rate stays the same or changes. If the dropout rate significantly decreased or increased, educators could not point to objective data that would explain why the rate had stayed the same or changed.

OCPS Special Student Needs personnel have brought these concerns to Florida DOE personnel responsible for dropout prevention programs and advised them of concerns about the existing outcome objectives.

Conclusions

The dropout prevention and retrieval program objectives mandated by the State of Florida describe programs, student eligibility criteria, and program requirements. The programs are intended for dropout retrieval, educational alternative programs, teenage parent programs, disciplinary programs, youth services programs, and substance abuse programs. The OCPS has implemented all of these programs according to the Dropout Prevention Act.

Examples of program requirements indicate that programs require certain components such as strong parental support and community support, but do not provide a systematic approach for acquiring those conditions.

Outcome objectives are aimed at the number of students who improve grades, improve attendance, and stay in school. Outcome objectives may not always address the actual reason for individual student referral (e.g., poverty, dysfunctional families) or reflect actual student progress. The outcome objectives do not always reflect the program objectives, curriculum and instructional methods of the programs as they are implemented and consequently not be useful, practical, relevant, and clear. OCPS Student Alternative Program personnel have brought this concern to the attention of Florida DOE personnel responsible for coordinating dropout prevention programs. Still, the objectives have not changed. Although the objectives are inspired by the legislation for dropout prevention, Florida DOE personnel have the responsibility for writing the objectives and may be appealed to for district collaboration in the writing of the objectives.

Recommendations

Consideration should be given to asking the highest level OCPS leaders to communicate to the DOE the need for a systematic, integrated approach to serving at-risk students that reflects the needs and resources of the OCPS as well as the criteria suggested by the foundation of research in alternative programs.

**4. Are there satisfactory operational guidelines for the program and are they available to program personnel and parents?**

Findings

The District Comprehensive Dropout Prevention Plan is produced annually and is available to the OCPS Advisory Committee for Dropout Prevention, all OCPS personnel, and parents and all other interested persons. The plan describes dropout retrieval programs and activities, related and support programs that provide dropout prevention, and individual dropout prevention programs. Program goals and student eligibility requirements are provided. The plan describes the participation of parents, business personnel, and community member support as well as the contributions made by school personnel to dropout prevention efforts. The plan also includes the general operating procedures of programs. Much of the program descriptions reflect the Florida State Laws (1992) for dropout prevention programs.

The plan also describes other OCPS programs and services for at- risk students. Many of these originate from the elementary and secondary instructional teams. The plan does not provide guidelines for integrating all the services that the OCPS provides for at-risk students. The plan describes the services of each unit (e.g., guidance, Chapter I, PREP), but does not provide a plan for interdisciplinary planning for at-risk students.

A review of related literature indicates that dropout prevention programs need certain planning components, including the following:

- √ Early identification of high-risk students by all teachers.
- √ The active involvement of all teachers in finding the appropriate response to student learning needs.
- √ District level support that takes into consideration the reasons students are leaving school and means for assessing needed resources.
- √ Dropout prevention plans for each school.
- √ A vigorous campaign to promote collaboration with community agencies, businesses, governmental agencies, and parents in dropout prevention efforts.

Such guidelines are necessary if programs are to bring about fundamental changes in dropout prevention.

Program descriptions and guidelines are available in the district plan for all alternative programs except the revised In-School Suspension program (which does not earn weighted FTE). The descriptions and guidelines are general in nature and for the most part follow those guidelines recommended in the review of related literature.

At this time there are no guidelines for developing individual school plans for dropout prevention as well or guidelines for interdisciplinary planning that would promote collaboration among OCPS teams, community agencies, businesses, governmental agencies, and parents and families in dropout prevention efforts.

A plan has been developed by Student Alternative Programs for schools to be included in the Student Services School Plan.

Conclusions

General guidelines found in the Comprehensive Plan reflect many of the components recommended in the professional literature. Revised guidelines are being developed for

the In-School Suspension program. Guidelines are not available that would provide a system for interdisciplinary planning and service among all OCPS personnel and teams, community agencies, business personnel, government agencies, parents, and others who may be responsible for educating, training, and assisting at-risk students (see evaluation question six).

Recommendations

Consideration should be given to rewriting program guidelines with specific information about best practices to assist OCPS personnel implement alternative education programs consistently and according to best practices.

Consideration should be given to providing specific program guidelines to initiate interdisciplinary planning and service that would provide increased opportunities for learning and success for at-risk students in regular classrooms as well as alternative classrooms. This program planning may be accomplished through restructuring and reform initiatives.

Consideration should be given to working with the elementary and secondary teams in determining what guidelines might increase opportunities for interdisciplinary planning and service to provide optimal conditions for student success.

**5. Is staff development adequate to meet the needs of teachers, counselors, support personnel, and administrators who implement or coordinate the programs?**

Findings

Review of related research studies in dropout prevention indicates that one of the most important aspects of successful dropout prevention programs is the quality of school administrators, teachers, counselors, and support staff. Teachers, particularly must be highly competent as well as have a commitment to serving at-risk students. Staff development in discipline strategies, effective communication, crisis counseling, and behavior management is important.

Teachers who implement alternative programs in the OCPS represent such certification areas as elementary, elementary physical education, English, math, science, health, business education and speech and drama. The needs of at-risk students are enormous and require special teaching skills in addition to competency in specific subject areas. As the percentage of at-risk students increases, there is increased needs for all teachers to have skills necessary to meet the challenges of teaching at-risk youth. There is no requirement that teachers acquire these skills through the certification process or any other induction process.

Alternative education teachers must adjust the curriculum and implement new and innovative instructional strategies. National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) recommends building a group of in-house experts who can provide peer coaching.

District and school staff development can provide information and training for teachers of at-risk students.

Staff development suggestions are included in the Comprehensive Plan for Dropout Prevention. Each alternative education program has certain staff development components and the plan indicates what team will supply the staff development. A review

of those requirements indicates that each program has a variety of topics for staff development, found in Appendix B of this report. The requirements reflect an eclectic approach to alternative education teacher inservice training. In addition, teachers are encouraged to participate in school-based staff development. The requirements for staff development may not always reflect the purpose and scope of the program (e.g., parent involvement training to increase parent participation).

Interviews with selected experienced alternative education teachers (e.g., School-Within-A-School teachers at two middle schools and two high schools) indicated that these teachers would like to have their expertise in dealing with at-risk students recognized and that they would be willing to present inservice activities. Administrators interviewed indicated that they would like to see OCPS experts present staff development on alternative teaching techniques. Administrators reported that they preferred OCPS personnel over out-of-state speakers. A review of research in alternative education and the doctoral research conducted by Jennifer Reeves confirms that in-house experts are effective sources of staff development. The OCPS Director for Alternative Programs regularly includes alternative education teachers (e.g., SWS teaching teams) in local and state staff development presentations.

The Instructional Support Resource Teacher for Alternative Programs has provided staff development for dropout prevention teachers for three years. Staff development, based on needs, is provided in small and large group sessions as well as individual consultation. The resource teacher uses a coaching and modeling approach to present strategies for teaching and dealing with at-risk students and their parents. She has a great deal of credibility with teachers since she has successfully taught at-risk students at elementary and secondary schools. She meets with teachers on site and conducts classes with at-risk students to model effective strategies for teachers. Teachers report that this is an effective method for staff development delivery.

Related staff development is presented by other members of the Special Student Needs Team including discipline programs, especially those that emphasize discipline with dignity. The presenter of these programs is booked for one year in advance. The Alternative Education Program has an orientation for all teachers new to any alternative program in that area. These programs also have the support of a district curriculum resource teacher.

Teachers of at-risk students also may attend OCPS Training and Staff Development workshops such as FPMS training, multicultural awareness, and cooperative learning strategies and content area workshops and seminars.

Teachers of at-risk students may not have formal education and training in alternative methods of instruction and classroom management. Such teachers may also be new to the teaching profession and be in the Professional Orientation Program.

Conclusions

Staff development activities designated for alternative program personnel vary widely among programs. The instructional support teacher for alternative education provides staff development workshops and other activities to teachers and program assistants. The teacher works with small groups and individuals and models effective teaching techniques. These methods of staff development are perceived as effective by alternative education teachers. Staff development activities are also provided by district subject area program consultants in preplanning and on district inservice days. Alternative education teachers are encouraged to attend district content area staff development. Alternative

education programs have an orientation for new teachers, which is supported by the curriculum resource teacher for that area.

Experienced alternative education teachers would like to be seen as experts and are willing to present information to fellow school faculty members. The research in alternative education confirms that in-house experts are effective sources of staff development. The Director for Alternative Programs regularly includes alternative education teachers (e.g., SWS teaching teams) in local and state staff development presentations.

Teachers new to alternative education usually have had no preservice education or inservice and staff development about alternative teaching methods and classroom management. New teachers could benefit from systematic staff development especially during the first year of alternative education teaching. All alternative teachers could benefit from staff development related to the purpose, goals and objectives of individual programs (e.g., parent involvement). As the percentage of at-risk youth increases, so does the need for staff development specific to teaching at-risk youth for all teachers.

Recommendations

Considerations should be given to entrusting the coordination of school-based staff development plans for alternative education teachers to the instructional support teacher for alternative education programs so she may work with the school-based staff development representative in coordinating staff development activities.

Consideration should be given to developing a cadre of in-house alternative education teacher experts to increase the staff development options and opportunities for alternative education teachers and program assistants.

Consideration should be given to addressing the need for collaboration among personnel serving at-risk students at the school level by developing alternative education orientation presentations for principals, assistant principals, CRTs, deans, and guidance counselors.

Consideration should be given to extending the existing Alternative Education Centers teacher orientation program, based on systematic staff development, for all teachers who are new to the field of alternative education. Within the orientation may be the core skills needed by alternative education teachers so that systematic staff development may be based on these needs. The curriculum resource teacher for those programs may assist in this process.

Consideration should be given to reviewing the current list of inservice suggestions for alternative education to determine core competencies that meet the needs of alternative education teachers.

**6. Is there an articulated plan for coordinating all at-risk, dropout prevention efforts so that students achieve optimal success?**

Findings

An articulated plan means offering a plan that includes program components and the "joints" of the components; it provides a guide for using the component parts.

The Comprehensive Plan for Dropout Prevention describes the programs and services available in the OCPS for at-risk students. This description lists those programs in

alternative education as well as the programs offered by other departments, schools, and teams. A collection of programs and services are described that are in addition to the alternative education programs. Student services areas such as attendance and social work, guidance and counseling, health services, occupational placement services, and psychological services are just some of the resources intended by the OCPS to be available to at-risk students.

Instructional areas such as PREP, PRIME, Chapter I, bilingual programs, exceptional education programs, and free and reduced price lunch and breakfast program, fifth grade DARE program, before- and after-school programs, Student Assistance Teams, middle school IMPACT classes, and Teachers as Advisors programs are described as programs for at-risk students. OCPS teachers, administrators, and support staff interviewed during the course of the evaluation expressed concern about the lack of communication among program personnel in these programs and the need for collaboration among instructional programs. Administrators perceived overlap of programs, counterproductiveness of programs, and a lack of continuity among the many programs serving at-risk students.

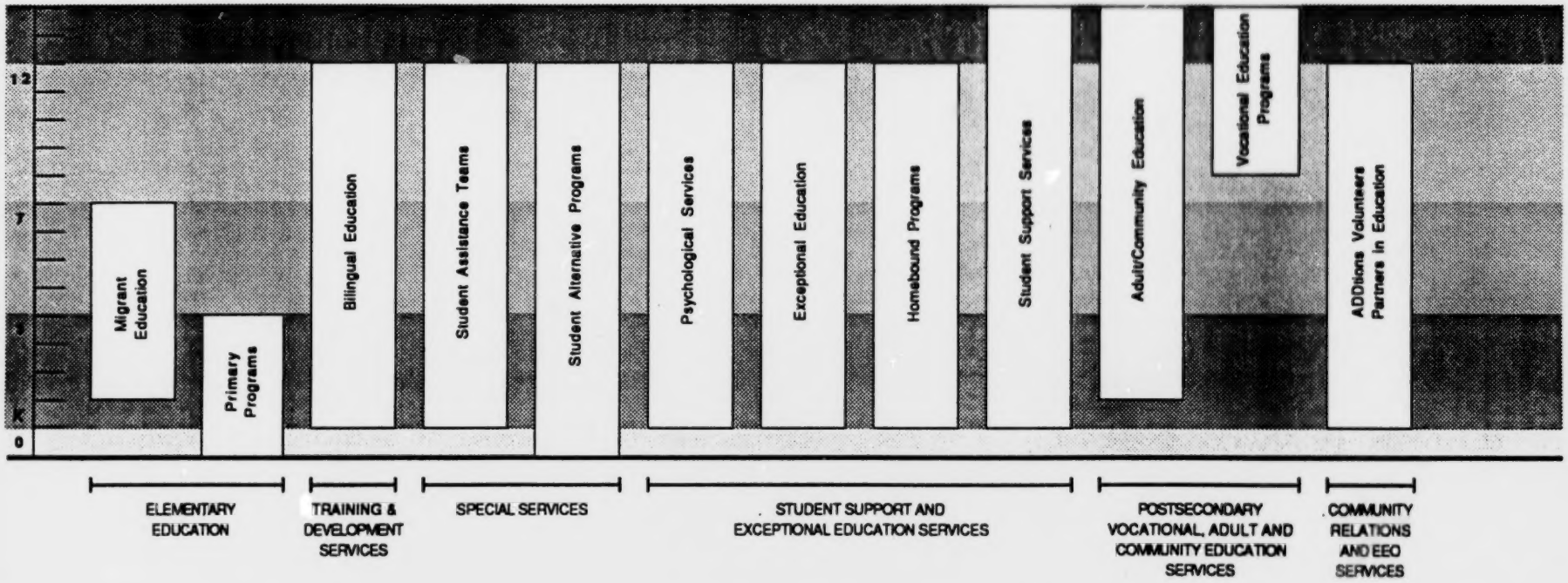
A preliminary review of job descriptions indicates that personnel responsible for attending to potential dropouts do not have the benefit of an articulated plan for providing services. Florida Statute 230.2313 (3) (a) describes guidance services such as "the following up of early school dropouts and graduates;....an organized system of informational resources on which to base educational vocational decisions including advising students on the availability of vocational and alternative programs that could provide successful high school completion opportunities for students at risk of dropping out of school." Yet elementary, middle, and high school counselors do not have dropout prevention activities specifically included in their job descriptions. The comprehensive guidance handbook does include counseling for "those students who have been identified as being "at risk" for failure in the school..." (page 12). Counselors have a plethora of other responsibilities.

District and school-based administrators and teachers consistently expressed the common concern that some at-risk programs are isolated from other programs and services and may not have a network for tapping all the other resources available to the at-risk students that they serve. Administrators and teachers also expressed concern that "turf" was an issue and perhaps a barrier to coordinating all programs. The issue of "turf" is not seen as easily overcome, although most personnel interviewed thought that it needed to be addressed.

The illustration that follows displays the programs that are intended to serve at-risk students and students who have dropped out of school. Clearly, the OCPS has a plethora of programs, services, efforts and resources committed toward meeting the needs of at-risk students. At least 53 programs are described as dropout prevention efforts and/or resources in the OCPS Comprehensive Plan for Dropout Prevention (Appendix A). At least six different departments administer the programs and there is no one central department that acts as a clearinghouse to coordinate efforts and resources to ensure optimal communication among programs as well as services to students.

ORANGE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**DROPOUT PREVENTION SERVICES**



Conclusion

As reflected here and in evaluation question number three, teachers and administrators in the OCPS indicate a high need for an articulated plan to ensure that programs for at-risk students are as effective, efficient, and integrated as possible to meet the needs of at-risk students.

Recommendation:

Consideration should be given to organizing a blue-ribbon task force, coordinated by the Special Student Needs Team, to work with instructional and support programs to develop an articulated plan for all programs serving at-risk students to optimize programs and services for these children. Such a plan may create an in-house forum to enhance networking and integration of programs that serve at-risk children.

**7. How do state and district personnel collaborate to plan dropout prevention strategies?**

Findings

The State DOE mandates certain dropout prevention programs and Florida School Laws suggest prevention strategies. The Florida DOE regional consultant for Dropout Prevention meets regularly with the OCPS coordinator of dropout prevention programs. This person provides technical assistance to OCPS personnel about Florida State Laws and Rules including interpretation and procedures to follow for compliance. There are additions to the rule every year and the coordinator of dropout prevention programs reports that the DOE consultants are very helpful and communicative.

The Florida DOE consultants assisted in the preparation for the DOE audit and provided feedback to district administration regarding that audit.

The Florida DOE follows the laws enacted by the legislature for dropout prevention and assists in program compliance rules and procedures. The role of the Florida DOE dropout prevention personnel is one of communication and technical assistance, but not of collaborative planning with district personnel responsible for implementing alternative programs.

The Florida DOE publishes descriptions of exemplary programs, and several OCPS dropout prevention programs are to be included in the next edition.

Conclusion

Florida DOE personnel responsible for dropout prevention programs provide technical assistance to district level personnel.

Recommendations

None

**8. To what extent do dropout prevention goals for students reflect collaboration among faculty, parents, and community resource personnel?**

Findings

Research findings indicate that plans for dropout prevention must focus on forces that affect the development of the "whole child." Since no one segment of society or even a school district can ameliorate such forces as poverty, dysfunctional families, child abuse and neglect, and social inequity, collaboration is required. Collaboration among the personnel responsible for the programs and services available to at-risk students would bring strength to programs and prevent students from "falling between the cracks."

NASSP and other professional organizations recommend large scale collaboration among schools, parents, and resources outside the school.

Each program described in the Comprehensive Plan for Dropout Prevention has a number of persons who are to work collaboratively in serving at-risk students. The plan describes how school personnel, agency personnel, and parents should work together to implement programs.

Elementary Alternative Resource Classroom

The program description states that the school guidance counselor will work closely with this program in counseling sessions and group interaction. The school psychologist and social worker will also contribute to class activities.

Teachers at the three elementary alternative resource classrooms were interviewed about how they worked with guidance counselors, social workers, and school psychologists. The following summarizes their responses.

School one: The guidance counselor sees students through the regular classroom (not the alternative classroom) and will see students if the teacher sends the student to the counselor. The teacher does not see the school psychologist or the social worker.

School two: The guidance counselor talks to one girl regularly. The psychologist and social worker have not been a part of the program.

School three: The guidance counselor gives a lesson for the whole group once a week and pulls out for special programs (e.g., divorce). The school psychologist sits in on EPT meetings and the social worker is used for dealing with truants or for neglect and abuse cases.

The teachers at schools one and two have students who live in poverty and the teachers often procure clothing and shoes for their needy students so that they may attend school. One teacher purchases the clothing and shoes from the Salvation Army and the other obtains clothes and shoes from her church, which collects donated clothing.

In-School Suspension

The 35 in-school suspension program assistants are typically not part of any school department or team. The original program description for in-school suspension required the in-school suspension teacher to part of the guidance department. The district instructional support teacher supports the program assistants with regular staff development and communication and conducts group sharing sessions.

A sample of 17 program assistants who were interviewed indicated that they had little or no interaction with guidance counselors, teachers, and parents. A minority reported regular interaction with administrators.

New Horizons

The New Horizons program description states that these counselors should be part of the guidance department in the secondary schools. Parent participation is considered an important part of the program.

Interviews with 18 of the 20 New Horizons counselors indicated that all 18 were part of the Student Assistant Team. Twelve reported that they were not part of the guidance department while five were part of that unit. Teachers are one source of referrals of students for the program.

The vast majority of parents of students enrolled in the program are alcohol and or drug dependent, yet only an average of 50 percent of parents participate in the program.

The counselors meet once a week at the Center for Drug Free Living.

The Challenge Center

Teachers at this center collaborate with the worksite supervisors of Challenge students to ensure that students are successful on the job and in the classroom. The teachers and supervisors are consistent in their expectations for achievement, progress, and employability skills. The approach is team-like and teachers report that this method strengthens each component of the program.

The Plaza Center

Teachers at this new center collaborate with Private Industry Council (PIC) personnel who help find jobs for students. Teachers contact employers, but unlike the Challenge Center, job supervisors are not on site to collaborate with teachers on daily basis due to logistical problems associated with multiple employers.

School-Within-A-School

This program requires a team approach. Teachers work collaboratively to teach at-risk students. According to the program description, student services provide assistance as students are referred. One to three guidance counselors and one administrator are to act as team members. The program admission procedures include that parents should participate in the referral process (e.g., conferences with teachers).

In actuality, it appears that an effective team may also involve other members of the faculty such as the reading specialist, the New Horizons counselor, and the Student Assistance Program coordinator. Teachers reported that few parents were participating in and supporting the program.

For the most part, collaboration with agency personnel occurred on an ad hoc basis. Community resource personnel and parents are not included in the goals of most programs.

Conclusions

Two of the elementary alternative classroom teachers, for the most part, work alone. One elementary alternative classroom teacher works cooperatively with the guidance counselor. This is contrasted with the high school model of school-within-a-school, where a team approach is taken and where there is often a large amount of collaboration with other school personnel. Parent participation and collaboration is minimal in both cases.

The In-School Suspension program assistant does not have opportunities to work collaboratively with other program staff and has few conferences with parents. This person is not typically part of any school department or team.

New Horizons counselors seem to collaborate most with the Student Assistant Team and less with the guidance department. A sample of alternative teachers, resource teachers, TAP coordinators, and counselors revealed specific examples of working with the New Horizons counselors. Only about 58% of parents participate in the program.

The Challenge Center teachers collaborate with job supervisors to enhance student academic and vocational success. The Plaza Center collaborates with PIC to obtain jobs for students.

Community resource personnel and other teachers in the school are not part of the goals for collaboration in the present program descriptions.

Recommendations

Consideration should be given to developing the collaborative efforts of the alternative elementary resource classroom to include resource persons such as guidance counselors, social workers, and other teachers. This collaboration may be outlined in the Comprehensive Plan for Dropout Prevention and communicated to principals and teachers.

Consideration should be given to assigning the in-school suspension program assistant to a school department (e.g., guidance) and to presenting the in-school suspension program description to faculty members at sharing sessions or faculty meetings.

Consideration should be given to making the New Horizons counselor part of the guidance department.

Consideration should be given to replicating the Challenge Center's collaboration with employers at other centers and in other programs.

**9. To what extent have schools established an assessment system for monitoring student progress, parent involvement, volunteerism, Partners in Education activities, student attendance patterns, and progress toward meeting program goals?**

Findings

Student Progress

Interviews with district and school based administrators, teachers, and support staff who implement alternative education programs indicated a variety of ways that teachers monitor student academic progress. School personnel use a variety of methods to monitor student progress including criterion referenced tests (e.g., DRP), grades, teacher-made

tests, norm-referenced tests (e.g., the SAT-8), participation in extracurricular and school events and activities, and student behavior. There did not appear to be a systematic or uniform method for measuring student progress. Teachers kept anecdotal records in elementary classrooms and SWS teachers recorded the progress students made in contributing to community projects and volunteer programs. SWS teachers shared student progress with team members during planning time. Transfer students could be enrolled for some time before records from their previous school reached the new home school, especially if the students had come from out of state. Student cumulative folders are transmitted from elementary to middle to high schools.

Other Measures

Schools record volunteer hours biweekly, student attendance records are completed daily, and parent involvement is recorded through PTA and PTO participation and number of parent volunteers. Records are maintained that describe Partner in Education contracts and activities. Student attendance records are kept at each school and maintained over time by the district information systems. Alternative education teachers keep a log of parent contacts and conferences.

Although these factors are important, educators interviewed during the evaluation project were concerned primarily with information that would help them plan meaningful lessons, respond to student needs, and refer students to appropriate agencies.

Program outcome data are collected by school personnel by program area and reported to the district alternative education program specialists and to information systems teams. Summary data are recorded and reported to the Florida DOE.

The DOE also publishes records of volunteerism and Partners in Education contracts and provides awards to those schools with outstanding numbers of volunteers and partners.

Review of the literature related to education of at-risk students indicates that an assessment system is needed that is related to school goals and to performance of necessary skills. Research in dropout prevention programs led one author to suggest that school-created performance tests and standardized tests should be used to determine if students are on the planned trajectory (Levin, 1988). A schoolwide assessment system needs to be established to measure progress towards other goals such as parental involvement, student, student attendance and participation in extracurricular functions.

Interviews with administrators and counselors indicated the need for a tracking system for at-risk students so that information about needs and progress could be available to those teachers, counselors, and administrators who work with the students. This information would be especially helpful if it were easily and quickly accessible, and if the records could be kept over time.

The problem faced by some teachers in obtaining relevant student information emerged in the Phi Delta Kappa study of at-risk students. The study revealed that teachers had little information from school records and even less about out-of-school factors affecting students (e.g., emotional trauma). The lack of adequate information puts teachers in the disadvantageous position of dealing with symptoms and not causes. There are balancing concerns related to confidentiality and use of information that could result in students being stereotyped and having a cap placed on their potential.

Data are collected for Florida DOE outcome objectives. The DOE does not require monitoring individual student progress toward meeting program goals.

Conclusions

Schools maintain a variety of records, many that may impact at-risk students. Student progress is recorded using a variety of ways including informal teacher tests, grades, and portfolio materials. More formal methods are also used to trace student progress including the DRP, SAT-8, and other published tests. Schools and district offices maintain records about parent involvement, volunteer participation, and Partners in Education.

Administrators and counselors expressed a need for a system, readily available to schools, to monitor progress of at-risk students over time.

The annual school report is no longer required, so that school profile is no longer available. There is no system for describing schools in terms of student progress at this time. The Florida DOE will publish the requirements for a school "report card" in the fall of 1992.

Recommendation

Consideration should be given to working with instructional program leaders and information systems personnel in developing a system, which would be accessible to teachers, for monitoring student progress that would ensure confidentiality and fairness.

**10. What are the critical components and successful approaches of selected dropout prevention programs according to OCPS personnel and the review of related literature?**

Findings

Schools

Literature related to dropout prevention indicates that successful dropout prevention efforts must tailor educational responses to the specific situations of students. Schools contribute to student failure when they refuse to adapt to students, and demand instead that students adapt to school policies and practices. Students need to be part of a supportive peer group and develop social and emotional ties to teachers and peers. Students need to become involved in school activities and must believe that they can achieve high school completion.

Levin (1988) pointed out the major assumptions underlying accelerated schools, and these assumptions may be used as a foundation for any effective school program. Levin explains that three major assumptions are as follows:

Unity of purpose: an agreement among parents, teachers, and students on a common set of goals for the school that will be the focal point of everyone's efforts. These should focus on bringing children into the educational mainstream so that they can fully benefit from further schooling and adult opportunities.

Empowerment: this is the ability of key participants (e.g., parents, teachers, principals, community leaders) to make important decisions about the education of students. It goes beyond blaming other participants or factors "beyond their control" for the poor educational outcomes of disadvantaged children.

Building on strengths: refers to utilizing all of the learning resources that students, parents, school staff, and communities can bring to the educational endeavor (Seeley, 1981).

One component of dropout prevention is the transition from one school level to the next. The transition from elementary to middle school, and from middle to high school places new demands on students who must adjust to the often large and less personal middle and high school structure. In Florida, there is no summer school available for fifth graders going into the sixth grade, the first year of middle school. Interviews with OCPS instructional personnel indicated that there is potential for assisting students with the transition from one school level to the next by restructuring and amplifying summer school.

When a structured and positive summer school is implemented, such as the summer school for entering ninth grade School-Within-A-School students at Apopka High School, at-risk students begin the first year of high school with a 4.0 GPA and many positive experiences with peers, teachers, and administrators.

Student Alternative Programs

Certain critical components and successful approaches were identified by the faculty and staff of selected student alternative programs. These common components and approaches are presented below by program.

- Elementary Alternative Resource Classroom. These three teachers and their principals indicated that strong administrative support was necessary for the program to succeed; administrators indicated that selection of personnel appropriate for the job was most important for program success.

1. Selection of personnel: the team members should be excellent teachers with an attitude of caring for the at-risk youth, but the resolve to be firm and tough when the occasion demands.

2. Strong administrative support: the school principal needs to support the program and have a full understanding of its purpose and scope. The principal needs to know the progress of the program. If there is not strong administrative support, the team cannot achieve its goals.

3. Positive view of program: it is important that the rest of the school – students and teachers – view the program as positive and not a dumping ground. It is important that the regular teachers view the students, not as stereotypes of bad kids, but as students with special needs.

Two of these teachers procured clothing and shoes for students so they could attend school. Both teachers need resources for clothing and shoes.

- School-Within-A-School. Based on interviews with SWS teams in middle and high schools, administrators, guidance counselors, TAP coordinators, SAFE coordinators and others, the following criteria for a successful SWS have emerged:

1. Selection of students: many students may qualify for SWS according to their at-risk profile, but one of the most important attributes is the desire to stay in school. Teams can help students who have the desire to stay in school and the belief that

they can finish school; they report that helping students without this desire and belief is extraordinarily difficult.

2. Selection of personnel: the team members should be excellent teachers with an attitude of caring for at-risk youth, but the resolve to be firm and tough when the occasion demands.

3. Strong administrative support: the team benefits from administrators who know what the program is all about, how it operates, and who have confidence in the team. If there is not strong administrative support, the team cannot achieve its goals.

4. Parental responsibility: although the parental response of SWS students is usually very limited and weak, the program can be improved greatly if parents and guardians support what the SWS team is trying to do, and communicate frequently and regularly with the school.

5. Positive view of program: it is important that the rest of the school - students and teachers – view the program as positive and not a dumping ground. It is important that the regular teachers view the students, not as stereotypes of bad kids, but as students with special needs.

6. Community participation: those teams with a component of community service for students find that this participation helps develop responsibility in students. Students seem to benefit from helping others. Teams that do not have a community service component would like to have one.

7. Summer school: the summer school approach for SWS students coming from the middle school is a great help in getting students off to the right start in high school. The concept should be broadened to include more students and more grade levels.

8. Common planning time: Teachers benefit from meeting regularly to plan and discuss program issues.

9. SWS teachers may be more flexible. SWS teachers are willing to use traditional approaches, but if these do not work they are willing to try new and even untried methods to reach students and help students succeed.

10. SWS teachers appreciate being viewed as experts on dealing with at-risk students and are willing to conduct staff development workshops and sharing sessions to help other teachers succeed with the at-risk population.

11. Teachers need to express high expectations for student achievement and hold students accountable for high academic standards in rigorous courses. Students are capable, and they know when the curriculum has been simplified and made easy.

Many of these findings were confirmed by the research done by Jennifer Reeves (unpublished manuscript, 1992) who, as part of her doctoral dissertation research, studied the attributes of effective teams who were teaching at-risk students

District and school-based Administrators and teachers consistently expressed concern that not all students can be served by the School-Within-A-School or the Alternative Elementary Resource Classrooms. Only a fraction of the students who have the at-risk

profile are able to be enrolled in these programs. Administrators expressed some concern about this group of students isolated from the mainstream. Many administrators and teachers also expressed the desire to see the critical elements of the two programs available to all teachers in all schools so that the total number of at-risk students could benefit from these elements.

- In-School Suspension. In-school suspension units are no longer staffed with contract teachers. Units are with staffed the classified position of program assistant. The program assistants who were interviewed for the evaluation expressed common concerns about critical aspects of program operation.

Their major concerns are included here:

The unit must have administrative support and that support must be seen by students (e.g., by administrators visiting the unit). In addition, there is a need for a uniform philosophy of discipline for the entire school so that the unit will be used in a consistent manner. Five different administrators may have five different discipline philosophies.

This unit must maintain the recommended number of students enrolled or it will not be effective as a dropout prevention tool. There is a recommended number (e.g., 15) and when the unit has significantly surpassed that number (e.g., 35-65) the unit cannot achieve its objectives.

There is a need for coursework assignments from classroom teachers that are timely and appropriate for individual student ability and the length of time available in the program. (sometimes assignments are late or never come; some assignments are not long or complex enough since students can accomplish a larger amount of work in the study hall-like environment of the unit.)

There is a need for the in-school suspension program assistant to be attached to some department in the school, for example guidance, to decrease the isolation of the position and to increase team approach to discipline.

There is a need for consistent guidelines so the program can be used to its best advantage.

Conclusions

The literature related to dropout prevention indicates that schools contribute to the failure of students by demanding that students adapt to school policies and practices rather than adapting to individual student needs. Levin points to three assumptions for any effective program for at-risk students including unity of purpose among parents, teachers and students, empowerment which goes beyond blaming others for failure, and building on strengths such as competent teachers, caring parents, and supportive community members.

The teachers and administrators in the School-Within-A-School and the Alternative Elementary Classrooms have reached consensus about the critical attributes of a successful program for at-risk students. Examples of critical elements include selection of competent personnel, strong administrative support, positive view of the program, selection of students, parental support, common planning time, and high expectations for students. Teachers and administrators interviewed for this project would like to see these elements available to all teachers in every school. There are barriers to implementing

these elements, such as the elimination of the 7th period in secondary schools, which means that there is no common planning time available.

In-school suspension program assistants have determined that there are critical elements necessary for successful use of this program, including a unified school discipline philosophy and program enrollment not to exceed fifteen students per day.

Recommendations

Consideration should be given to including the critical attributes of the programs in the program description of the plan so that school faculty and administrators would be able to include these elements in the alternative programs at their schools.

Consideration should be given to providing the critical attributes in the school-within-a-school to all teachers responsible for educating at-risk students through staff development activities.

**11. What are the critical issues facing teachers and administrators who are serving at-risk students?**

Findings

Interviews with teachers, counselors and administrators who are serving at-risk students or are supporting those who serve at-risk students elicited several issues considered critical in implementing dropout prevention and intervention. Some of these issues are addressed in professional literature related to dropout prevention. These issues are described here.

Attendance and Attendance Policies

Poor attendance was listed as a problem exhibited by at-risk students by all those responsible for dropout prevention programs. Absences were was usually unexcused and included being tardy for first period. Teachers and administrators are required by law to keep accurate attendance records. Teachers, deans and assistant principals in charge of attendance report that parents are part of the attendance problem, often not calling the school to report excused absences and not insisting that their children attend school. Teachers and administrators report that the chief cause of absenteeism by students is the students' belief that school is not important and that it will not make a difference in their lives.

Administrators would like to see the attendance policies of the district reviewed and rewritten to be more clear and direct. Administrators would like a policy that did not allow easy access to the appeal process by parents, would be strict, and yet would offer some amount of flexibility to meet individual student needs.

Teachers and administrators report that there are some students who have legitimate cause for absence or tardiness. A child who dresses and gets younger siblings off to school, then comes to high school may have a real need for excused tardiness. The student whose parents drop him off in the morning at 8:30 after they have come off shift work may have a legitimate reason to arrive late for school.

Tulsa, Oklahoma school district has begun legal prosecution of parents who are not sending their children to school. The efforts have resulted in a 43 percent reduction in the dropout rate in a two-year period. There is evidence that the court action acts as a an

incentive or external motivation to some parents, who are now sending their children to school rather than allowing them to stay at home.

Parent Participation

Teachers, administrators and counselors indicate that many parents of at- risk students do not participate in the school as members of PTA/PTO or as volunteers. Often these parents work, some do not have telephones, and many are not at ease in the school environment. Many of the programs for at-risk students have parent participation as a component; parents are asked to approve their child's placement in the alternative program and they are contacted during the school year. Many teachers of at-risk students telephone parents when things are going well, just to begin communicating in a positive way.

One principal in charge of a school with a large number of at-risk children had known some of the parents when they were students. She suggests that the parents of at-risk students often do not have good parenting skills and do not know options for discipline and training children. She felt strongly that they needed parenting classes.

Student Baggage

Students come to school with a great deal of "baggage"; many students have alcohol or drug dependent parents, have parents who may be abusive or neglectful, may not have a permanent home but live place to place, and have an array of emotional problems. This baggage makes it very difficult to address the students' academic needs, even though the students may have intellectual aptitude. Sometimes students, even with caring parents and material needs met, have "tuned out" school and are difficult to teach.

Student Poverty

Some students are not living in homes, but in shelters, in cars, and with friends or acquaintances. These student conditions cause great concern to school administrators and teachers. The poverty seemed most apparent at the elementary level.

School response to at-risk students and alternative programs

The School-Within-A-School teams report that faculty response to the SWS team varies: some teachers understand what efforts are being made by the unit, and others think that SWS teachers have it easy. Teachers and guidance counselors express some concern about how the team is viewed and question if another name might be helpful. These personnel are concerned that the terms "team" and "paws" may begin to have negative connotations to teachers and students.

Teachers and counselors are concerned that the response of teachers and other faculty members toward at-risk students may cause the students to become further at-risk and isolated. This concern is reflected in the professional literature where some researchers point to the school as a cause of at-risk students.

Teachers as Advisors Program (TAP)

Six OCPS high schools have TAP. The TAP program was recognized by teachers of at-risk students and by occupational placement specialists as being an effective tool, especially for entering 9th grade students. The program funding has been cut, so other schools are not likely to implement the program.

Compact

Seven of the 13 OCPS high schools have the Compact program. Compact is also available at middle schools. The Compact program is seen by teachers and counselors who work with at-risk youth as a real help to at-risk students, especially those who are enrolled in school-within-a-school in 9th grade. Teachers see Compact as a help to students in making the transition to regular classes and would like to see more Compact placements available.

No Umbrella

Many programs exist for the purpose of dropout prevention serving at-risk students. There is no clearinghouse for these programs and some program personnel may become isolated and less effective because of lack of knowledge about resources. Administrators expressed concerns about the fragmentation of programs and would prefer that dropout prevention program be coordinated by instructional personnel. Administrators perceived the fragmentation at the district level and within schools.

Because of high turnover, some teachers and administrators do not know about services available to at-risk students. It seems that all of the services available to at-risk students are not known to all school personnel who may be serving these students.

Orange County, Florida Code of Student Conduct

The purpose of the OCPS Code of Student Conduct is to assist students, parents, teachers, and school administrators in the maintenance of an environment that will enhance the achievement of the objective (i.e., develop each student's potential for learning and to foster positive interpersonal relationships). The code defines five levels of infractions and related consequences.

The Code of Student Conduct allows flexibility for school administrators. The disadvantage of this flexibility is found in the lack of uniformity in following the code. Secondary schools have more than one principal; middle schools have from three to six, and high schools have four to six. The discipline philosophy of the administrators often varies, and frequently the application of the code and its consequences vary greatly within the same school and across schools.

Guidance Potential

Teachers and administrators see potential for dropout prevention services coming from the guidance team. The retrieval services (e.g., meeting students who have dropped out and their parents after school) provided by high schools can result in students reentering the high school or community school. Even if this does not happen, school personnel have a better idea why the student dropped out.

Administrators would also like to see more integration of the Student Assistance Program and the Guidance Programs.

Magnet High School Programs

Administrators noted that there is no prestigious high school magnet program, such as International Studies, for at-risk students and expressed that this would be an appropriate alternative program for at-risk students. Interest was expressed in vocational, vocational

exploration, media production, arts, and other programs that would provide concrete learning opportunities for at-risk students who needed alternative education rather than traditional education.

Expansion of the Silver Star Center

Secondary district and school based administrators, concerned with the students who have been suspended and may be expelled, expressed the desire to see the Silver Star Center expanded and placed in four sections of the district. The program is seen as a positive way to help students with problems stay in school and reduce the number of school suspensions. The center provides an intense academic focus with a low teacher/student ratio. Plans to enlarge the Silver Star Center (sometimes referred to as the Smith Center) have been submitted to the 1992-93 budget by the Special Needs Team with the support of the Secondary Education Team.

Common Focus

Several administrators expressed concern about alternative programs that are added on to the regular school. These administrators would like to see radical change in the school; for example, changes in the hours the school operates, a transition to competency-based education rather than time-based education, active dropout retrieval activities in the evenings, and training for all teachers in methods for dealing with at-risk students. Administrators expressed the belief that schools must change since students are not changing to meet the present requirements of the school. All teachers, counselors, and administrators interviewed expressed concern about the plight of at-risk students, and their own commitment to preventing students from dropping out and making the school environment one that was attractive to all students.

## Conclusions

Interviews with a variety of OCPS personnel responsible for educating and caring for at-risk students reveal that educators have serious concerns about programs and services for at-risk students, including confusion over attendance policies, lack of parent participation, students with serious problems originating at home, but complicating school success, faculty response to at-risk students, no "umbrella" under which all programs are coordinated, and lack of uniformity in the code of student conduct.

Interviews also yielded a number of suggestions for improving services for at-risk students. Personnel perceived possible improvements through remedying the concerns listed above as well as increasing TAP, Compact, further integration of the guidance department and the Student Assistance Program, introduction of magnet high schools programs for at-risk students, expansion of Silver Star Center (Smith Center), and real change in the school.

During interviews OCPS teachers, counselors, and administrators revealed introspective concerns about how schools are treating at-risk students and the types of programs available for preventing students from dropping out. Each person interviewed expressed commitment to preventing students from dropping out of school and the desire to see students want to come to school.

## Recommendations

Consideration should be given to forming a blue-ribbon at-risk task force at the direction of the Special Student Needs Team that would include representatives of teachers, parents,

community leaders and school administrators who might jointly address critical issues in dropout prevention. This task force might address school improvement as it relates to these issues.

Consideration should be given to developing mentoring partnerships between elementary alternative resource classrooms and district teams to provide support for students (e.g., student clothing and shoes) and practical experience for ELC-bound employees (e.g., Information Systems, Business and Administrative Services).

Consideration should be given to initiating a study of the issues relate to parent participation (delimited to participation of parents of at-risk children and youth) in the schools in cooperation with the Program Evaluation Office.

**12. Is the environment--including management, facilities, equipment, supplies, and materials--satisfactory to meet the needs of the program?**

Findings

School-Within-A-School and Elementary Alternative Resource Classrooms are housed in regular classrooms. Interviews with teachers and administrators indicated that the environment is adequate for these programs. Two of the elementary alternative resource classroom teachers indicated that several students at times throughout the year did not have adequate shoes, school clothes, or winter wraps.

In-School Suspension units are located in regular classrooms and portables on the school campus. The program assistants who were interviewed indicated that the environment is adequate if the number of students referred does not exceed the number the program was intended to serve. If the numbers greatly exceed the maximum number the unit can coordinate, the unit cannot be an effective alternative program.

BETA, a not-for-profit agency on Lake Underhill Drive, has a waiting list because there is limited classroom space at the BETA complex. If there were more classroom space, some of the waiting list of 48 young women could be served. There is adequate nursery room for additional infants and toddlers.

ACEPT, a OCPS funded program located at Westside Vocational Technical Center, has a 12 bed nursery for children of enrolled students, but the program can accept up to 40 teenage parents. There are times when the 12 bed nursery cannot accommodate the needs of the parents, and students are placed on a waiting list or they are enrolled at BETA if there is an opening.

The Challenge Center at Disney World has a small space to conduct classes and still smaller space for teacher offices. Teachers indicated that their environment was adequate and that the supervisors of Challenge students were helpful in providing incentives for students (e.g., some Disney departments paid for the Challenge student's robe and cap rental for graduation).

The Plaza Center opened in February 1992. Teachers requested more sophisticated sound and video equipment.

New Horizons counselors reported that they are housed either in an office or a classroom. Most of the counselors have the materials they need, with exceptions being access to a copy machine, workbooks, and a chalkboard.

Conclusions

It would appear that most programs for dropout prevention can be housed in regular classrooms. Some of the programs for dropout retrieval require nontraditional housing (e.g., Challenge Center at Disney World). Most of the programs that were included in the evaluation had adequate environments with the exception of ACEPT (which needed additional nursery space) and BETA (which needed additional student classroom space).

Recommendations

Consideration should be given to requesting that administrators enlarge the ACEPT nursery and to seek an additional site for BETA on existing OCPS property.

**13. What improvements are needed in the reporting procedures on dropout statistics to more accurately reflect actual dropouts?**

Findings

The U.S. Census Bureau defines a dropout as a person of high school age who is not enrolled in school and is not a high school graduate. The definition used by the Florida DOE, as defined by Florida School Laws (1992) is somewhat more elaborate.

Florida School Laws. Florida Statutes. 1991 Edition defines dropouts as student over the age of compulsory school attendance as defined in s. 232.01, who meets any one or more of the following criteria:

a. *The student has voluntarily removed himself from the school system before graduation;*
b. *The student has not met the relevant attendance requirements of the school district pursuant to State Board of Education rules, or the student was expected to attend a school but did not enter as expected for unknown reasons, or the student's whereabouts are unknown;*
c. *The student has withdrawn from school, but has not transferred to another public or private school or enrolled in any vocational, adult, or alternative education program;*
d. *The student has withdrawn from school due to hardship, unless such withdrawal has been granted under the provisions of s. 322.0601 (physical or mental disability), court action, expulsion, medical reasons, or pregnancy; or*
e. *The student is not eligible to attend school because of reaching the maximum age for an exceptional student program in accordance with the district's policy.*

The goal of a state's dropout statistics is to provide accurate data about actual dropouts. Uniform dropout definitions and procedures for recording withdrawals are needed so that statistics are valid and useful. If districts differ in record keeping, the state dropout reports will not be credible.

Florida's dropout rate, according to the above definition, was 5.6 percent in 1990-91, down from 6.55 percent in 1989-90. This decrease was reported in February 1992 by the Florida Department of Education.

According to records collected by schools and programs and compiled by the Student Alternative Programs, the OCPS had fewer dropouts in 1991-92 than in 1990-91. The following table demonstrates the change in numbers of dropouts.

Table
Dropout Data for High School Grades (9-12) for Two Years

| Grade | Number/Percentage WD '90-91 | Total Enrolled WD '91-92 | Number/Percentage WD '91-92 | Total Enrolled WD '91-92 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ninth | 535/6.4 | 8,307 | 264/3.1 | 8,522 |
| Tenth | 436/5.8 | 7,554 | 328/4.3 | 7,668 |
| Eleventh | 348/5.5 | 6,273 | 296/4.2 | 7,018 |
| Twelfth | 354/6.6 | 5,297 | 201/3.5 | 5,804 |
| Total | 1,673/6.07 | 27,431 | 1,089/3.75 | 29,012 |

These figures demonstrate that although the total population of high school students increased from '90-91 to '91-92, the number of students who dropped out of school decreased. There was a significant decrease from '90-91 to '91-92 in the percentage of dropouts in the OCPS, changing from 6.07% to 3.75%. It is difficult to determine the causal factors in this decrease. The use of in-school suspension, alternatives to expulsions, and other programs such as the Florida state law requiring school enrollment in order to obtain a driver's license may have affected the dropout rate.

According to the 1989-90 and 1990-91 figures, the number of dropouts in each OCPS high school decreased. The following table illustrates the decrease in numbers and the percent of dropouts compared to the total school population.

| High School | Dropouts 1990-91 Number/Percent | Dropouts 1991-92 Number/Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Apopka | 108/4.6 | 77/3.1 |
| Boone | 109/4.7 | 82/3.5 |
| Colonial | 170/6.8 | 104/4.0 |
| Dr. Phillips | 165/4.6 | 121/3.1 |
| Edgewater | 150/7.6 | 50/2.5 |
| Evans | 218/7.6 | 131/4.2 |
| Jones | 97/7.5 | 85/6.6 |
| Oak Ridge | 194/7.5 | 116/4.5 |
| University | 37/1.9 | 27/1.2 |
| West Orange | 220/8.0 | 130/4.7 |
| Winter Park | 112/4.0 | 55/2.0 |

The Student Alternative Programs Office monitors withdrawals and "did not enters" (DNE's) for the district and by school annually. This information is also summarized by school and by race and may be useful for program improvement.

Parent Responsibility

For the most part, individual schools take responsibility for dropout prevention and dropout retrieval. District level personnel provide specific programs and services aimed at meeting the needs of at-risk students. When dropout rates increase, schools and districts are blamed. It is easily overlooked by the public that there are significant others who

share responsibility for ensuring that students attend school. Florida School Laws (1992), Section 232.19, states that parents have responsibility for student school attendance, and further states the following:

*(a) A parent who refuses or fails to have a child who is under his control attend school regularly, or who refuses or fails to comply with the requirements in subsection (3), is guilty of a misdemeanor of the second degree, punishable as provided by the law. The continued or habitual absence of a child without the consent of the principal or teacher in charge of the school he attends or should attend, or of the tutor who instructs or should instruct him, is prima facie evidence of a violation of this chapter . . .*

Review of related literature indicates that other school districts (e.g., Tulsa, Oklahoma) are bringing charges against those parents who do not ensure that their children attend school. Results indicate that this procedure is effective in influencing parents to support school attendance.

The Process of Record Keeping

The OCPS Director for Alternative Programs reports that Florida DOE reporting procedures have improved somewhat in the last year and are approaching a fair formula. In the past dropout records were based on the cumulative dropouts, but not the cumulative enrollment (i.e., enrollment figures that did not take into account those students who were enrolled the previous year, but did not show up for school at the beginning of the next year). Dropout figures should reflect migration, mortality and retention factors. The Director for Alternative Programs continues to work with the Florida DOE representatives in developing accurate accounting for student dropouts. Dropout figures are complicated by those students who do not show up when school starts and do not contact school personnel; some may indeed be dropouts, but others have moved out of state, transferred to another school, or enrolled in a private school.

Each school is required to keep accurate records of student attendance according to school board policies on attendance. Florida School Laws require attendance records be kept by every teacher. Each alternative program maintains records of student attendance.

The Student Services Team supplies a list of students who have withdrawn from the school every nine weeks. Several school faculty and staff members are responsible for dropout retrieval activities. The occupational placement specialist has the responsibility of telephoning each withdrawn student to determine if the student transferred to another school, enrolled in a GED program, enrolled in a vocational-technical school, or withdrew from school and is not seeking further education.

The occupational placement specialists reach an average of 37% of the students who are listed as withdrawn. One of the main purposes of the contact is to determine which students are actually dropouts. Guidance counselors have expressed the desire to have a copy of this list to use in dropout retrieval efforts. A few guidance counselors conduct outreach activities in the evenings and confer with the student and the student's family to refer the student to GED, vocational-technical programs or to return to the home school. Administrators, attendance clerks and social workers also have responsibility for collecting accurate attendance data.

The system for record keeping is constantly updated and has been improved over time as Information Systems and Special Needs Teams work together. There may be additional improvements to screens that might improve record keeping for students who are

suspended and for withdrawal codes and expulsions as the teams continue to work together.

The state dropout rate overlooks the fact that many students in middle school withdraw and are considered dropouts. The statistics for middle schools indicated that 326 middle school children withdrew or did not enter in 1991-92. The total dropout rate for middle school was 1.34 percent. Dropout figures become more useful when summarized by school; 116 of the 326 students who dropped out of middle school were from one school, and out of the 116, there were 53 sixth graders who did not enter (DNE's).

Use of the Dropout Statistics

Dropout statistics may provide a general indication of the effect of programs for at-risk students. Dropout statistics are far less important to educators when compared to individual student needs and programs. The immediate challenges facing some at-risk students (e.g., poverty, child abuse) are sometimes so overwhelming that the concern about the yearly dropout rate is far less significant. Even as the dropout rate is reduced, the concern for the at-risk child continues and requires the joint commitment of educators, parents, and other taxpayers. The dropout rates, even when accurate, do not tell teachers and program administrators why the rate changed and what is most effective in preventing dropouts.

Interviews with teachers and administrators revealed deep concern for individual students and less interest in the dropout rate. Teachers were concerned that their students learn and recover from conditions such as alcohol, drug, and child abuse and neglect. Administrators were concerned about students who did not attend classes and who were on the streets and perhaps in unsafe environments. The overall dropout rate was insignificant compared to meeting the needs of large population of real live at-risk students.

The use of the records associated with the dropout rate may be far more important than the rate itself. For example, records describe types of referrals. This information could be used to determine patterns of behaviors, for students and for the school faculty who refer students. Patterns may indicate underlying problems and provide clues for problem solving. Records are kept on retention by school. The research on retention clearly shows this is an ineffective method at best, and harmful at worst. Records on retention may show patterns of school and grade retention and afford the opportunity to address this ineffective method of educating at-risk children. Records as simple as enrollment can demonstrate if the program is being used to its best advantage (e.g., actual enrollment by school for the year compared to the ideal enrollment). School summary reports, presented in an informational manner, could be used for school improvement (e.g., staff development initiatives, program improvement).

Conclusions

The formula for dropout rates is determined by the Florida DOE. The Florida dropout rate for 1990-91 was 5.6 percent. The OCPS dropout rate for 1991-92 is 3.75% (down from 6.07% in 1990-91). Student alternative programs may have had an impact on the reduction as well as improvements in record keeping required by the Florida DOE.

A number of district and school-based personnel are responsible for attendance records that form the basis of dropout statistics. The information needed to determine the dropout rate is complex. Even with accurate dropout statistics, teachers and administrators cannot determine exactly what factors contributed to a change in the rates. Teachers and

administrators expressed little concern about the yearly dropout rate and enormous concern about the needs of at-risk students at their schools. Student services retrieval activities were reported as effective when used, but used only selectively, depending on the school faculty. This method has the advantage of collecting real data about why students are dropping out as well as affording the opportunity to retrieve dropouts.

There is potential for using the records kept by the OCPS related to dropout prevention programs and dropout as a strategy for school program improvement. School statistical summary reports, presented in an informational manner, could be used for school improvement (e.g., staff development initiatives, program improvement).

Recommendations

Consideration should be given to assisting schools in implementing retrieval methods that determine why students have dropped out, and provide the opportunity to retrieve the student by enrolling in GED, vocational-technical school, or enrolling in the home school.

Consideration should be given to using the Florida State Laws to encourage parents to take an active role in making sure schools know when their children have entered other types of programs (e.g., home schooling) or transferred to other schools. These laws may also be used to encourage parents to take responsibility for ensuring their children attend school regularly.

Consideration should be given to providing informational reports to schools that may show patterns in dropout prevention program services such as retention history, most frequent referral types, and most frequent referral sources. This information might be used as part of school improvement (e.g., staff development opportunities for teachers in dealing with certain discipline problems).